

THE CEMENT HUNTERS

LOST GOLD MINE OF THE HIGH SIERRA

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James Wright - veteran mining correspondent of the San Francisco Papers.

History was first published in weekly serial form in the San Francisco Daily Evening Post between November 8 and December 13, 1879, and portions of it were afterward copied in the Mammoth City, Bodie, and Independence papers.

Wright - born 7/28/1834 - Columbus, Mississippi - valedictorian class of '57 at Princeton - came to California in 1868 - travelled Sierra and boom camps in late 1870's. Within about 4 years he had explored a great part of the high Sierra south of Yosemite and in 1882 made maps of the country for W. W. Elliott's "Guide to the Scenery of the Sierra Nevada", "The History of Fresno County" and "The History of Tulare County". The Sierra Club in 1925 gave his name to Wright Lakes and Creek near Mt. Whitney, which he had explored in 1881 in company with W. B. Wallace and F. H. Wales.

Mount Parker was named for James A. Parker of Bishop who in company with B. N. Love, B. S. Martin and N. D. Smith, discovered the nearby Alpha mine on June 20, 1877. This mountain should not be confused with Parker Peak, seven miles northeast of Mt. Lyell.

Pumice Gap - same as Mammoth Pass.

One version - more used - Original Cement Finders.

In summer of 1857 a party of emigrants on their way to the gold fields of California by the southern route, reached Death Valley. In the valley 2 men of this party lost their teams and had to leave their wagons and outfits. They kept with the train until they reached Owens Valley. They were told by their comrades that it was 60 miles across the Sierra to where the gold diggings were - but the wagons had to go much further north to find a suitable crossing. The 2 men left the train with packs. They came to the head of a stream supposed to be Owens River, and in travelling through the "burnt country" they sat down to rest. Some say this was near a spring or stream. They saw some curious looking rock which they pounded. They saw a good deal of what appeared to be gold. So much in fact, that they argued the point. One believed it was and took about ten pounds of the rock with him. Reaching another stream, beyond the divide, they crossed the mountains by following the river down to Millerton. So this stream is known as the San Joaquin.

Both tried mining and after a time separated. The one with the ore was unsuccessful in the mines and went to San Francisco. A year or two passed. He was taken down with consumption and placed himself for treatment under a Doctor Randall. *

The miner grew worse and when past recovery he asked the doctor to hand him a satchel that hung near his bed. He gave the doctor what was left of the lump of ore which he had found to be gold in Millerton. Since he couldn't return, he gave the doctor a minute description of the locality where he found it, saying it was on a stream heading in the Nevadas on

* Langley's San Francisco Business Directory fails to list any Dr. Randall in the city between 1856 and 1861, but from 1862 to 1865 it does list a Peter Randall, physician. In ~~the~~ 1866 the spelling of his last name is changed to Randle and as such he is listed until 1872.

on the opposite side from the San Joaquin River. He also made a rough map. This was in the fall of 1860. The doctor planned to keep quiet, but search for it the next year. The specimen is described by those who saw it afterwards, as a reddish, rusty looking cement, not unlike decomposed quartz, and thickly spangled with flakes of purest gold.

The first settlement by white men near Mono Lake had been made in 1857 on Virginia Creek, the east fork of Walker River. This was called Dogtown. The next spring, all hands, except John Richter, moved thence to where the new town of Mono* was located, on the north side of Mono Lake, and as regards the present flourishing towns of Bodie and Mammoth City, about 11 miles southwest of the former and 45 miles north of the latter. Rich placer diggings were found there, but were soon over-worked. In those days there were at least 1000 people in and around Mono. Aurora, Nevada - 18 miles northwest - had also become quite an enterprising mining center. Four years later than the settlement of Dogtown, the first white man as a permanent settler, had built his house on the site of Old Fort Independence in Owens Valley.

In 1861 a stir was created in the mining camp of Mono by a stranger, Dr. Randall from S. F. who wished to employ someone to go prospecting with him. He got a man and went out and located a quarter section of land on "Pumice Flat" some 37 miles south of Mono, and about 8 miles north of where Mammoth City now stands. He was called a fool for making such a location.

* The Monoville or old Mono, places were discovered on July 4th, 1859 by Cord Norst, a miner from nearby Dogtown.

In the spring of 1862 Dr. Randall returned, bringing a man with him. He then employed as fellow prospector and foreman Gid Whiteman and 11 men. Using a map for a guide, all 160 acres were thoroughly prospected. Dr. Randall found some red lava or cement which he thought was the ledge. He went to Mono and showed ore rich in gold - at least half - but this must have been the ore given him as the ledge did not pan out. But the word was out and miners flocked from Mono and Aurora. See - Roughing It, by Mark Twain, for discription of certain events. Mark wasn't always accurate, though.

A similar piece of gold-bearing cement or lava which came from the gold-fields of Australia, can be seen in the cabinet of the California Academy of Natural Sciences. (Remember - this is being taken from newspaper articles written in 1879).

Large lumps of pure laminated gold - forming with the reddish brown mass of decomposed quartz in which it was imbedded - very much appearing like red cement - was taken from "Life Preserver Mine" in Placer County in 1877.

Now - evidence exists that the red cement was found in 1862 during Dr. Randall's 2nd search - not by him or Whiteman, but by 2 men of the party who concealed the fact. See later information to follow.

Early in 1861 a stranger came to the town of Mono giving his name as Farnsworth. He offered to furnish an outfit and give a share in a rich claim he had found. He found a man and they set out together. But Farnsworth came back alone. He tried to get someone else to go with him. All were busy. He left and afterwards came back with a drayman from San Francisco with the name Hume. They made preparations and left. Shortly after, Farnsworth returned alone and said they had been attacked by Indians.

The other man had been killed by them, he claimed. He had a bullet hole through his boottop, and holes in his clothes that were apparently cut with a pocketknife. He didn't tell a straight story and suspicions arose. The miners appointed men to take charge of Farnsworth while a search party of 30 with Indian guides went to look for Hume. They easily traced him to the north branch of Owens River - now called Deadman's Creek - formerly Hume's Crossing or Murderer's Creek. The Indians found blood, hair and ax marks on a log. No Indian tracks were in evidence. They traced Farnsworth's tracks to where a mans head was found in the water covered by rocks. Nearby the body was found buried in the same manner. The body was buried at the root of a pine tree. The head was taken back to Mono - preserved in whiskey - and later identified by Hume's sister, who came from S.F. to check. However, Farnsworth escaped that night after the guard became drowsy. He was never seen again.

Hume's head was placed for identification in a keg of whiskey - preservative. An old alky drank nearly all the whiskey from the keg before he was detected and stopped. The keg was later buried near Mono but was hydraulicked out several times.

On November 22nd, 1879 one week before the publication of Wright's version of Hume's murder, the Mammoth City Herald published the following account. It is similar to Wright's but says that the murderer got only about \$500 for his hellish deed. And that he took the partners fine mule leaving his old horse. He arrived in the old Mono diggings or Dogtown with his flesh wound in the leg. He had done it with his own pistol - it was later determined. He (Farnsworth) later escaped on the mule after the remains were found. He had gotten his keeper drunk.

An invalid by the name of Van Horn was going by boat from Sacramento to S.F. and his friends, Carpenter and wife, of Aurora were with him. He was dying. He thanked Carpenter for his kindness and to repay him told him of his old connection with Dr. Randall's expedition. He was cook on the trip. One day the man that the doctor had brought with him, and who was said to have been the friend of the man who first found the cement, came in very much excited when Van Horn was alone. He was a German. He said he had found the mine. They conspired to get discharged the next day stating they didn't see "the use of hunting gold in a country where the rocks swim and wood sinks". (froth pumice and mountain mahogany) They left the next day - went to the ledge - took a sack of ore - buried their pick-ax and other items - covered the exposed cement with pumice and left to be better outfitted. They went to a point on Walkers River known as "the Elbow" - where they crushed and panned the ore getting \$30,000. in all. Authors Note: Not incredible if the ore was over half gold and about 175 pounds which 2 men and the horse could manage. These men then went to Virginia - took a partner and started back. Meanwhile, about a week after these men left, Gid Whiteman and his party quit work for Dr. Randall, and the latter disappeared from the scene.(1862)

Van Horn and companions arrived at 2 PM (it doesn't say when - assume later in 1862). The next morning at the site they planned for a cabin. Indians took all their belongings but spared their lives. They left promising to wait for the Indian war to end first. 2 were reported to have left for the greater war East with the "California Hundred", as Van Horn believed. The 3rd was Van Horn and he told the tale to Carpenter.

In 1865 a George Kirkpatrick and "Si" Colt nephew of Colonel Samuel Colt of pistol celebrity was with him. When they arrived with a party to Mono

they enlisted the services of a Mr. Wilson to take them to the site of Gid Whiteman's camp. Mr. Wilson said No until the Van Horn story was told him. Then Yes. (but - nothing is said of how the story passed between Carpenter and Kirkpatrick - if it ever did)

With some Indian guides and former cement hunters - the country was scoured. One Indian chief showed a destroyed camp to one of the hunters. A sheath knife was found with a V on the handle - later identified as Van Horn's. Later a few rods from this site, 2 skeletons were found which may have belonged to the 2 former companions of Van Horn that may have returned instead of going East as Van Horn thought. The Indians had killed them.

And tho many searched thereafter, no one found the mine. But others, including Alpha and Mammoth were discovered.

Now - late in May 1869 2 men arrived in Stockton on an overland train from, they said, Salt Lake City, tho indicating they had both been in California in the earlier mining days. They remained in Stockton long enough to get outfitted. They went to Jone's Store on the south bank of the San Joaquin. They arrived there in mid-June. This was then a noted supply point. Replenishing supplies they entered the mountains going to Crane Valley. Leaving the wagon at a ranch they hired pack animals and took 2 Indian guides. One man said he knew the Inyo and Mono Counties and just wanted guides to take them to the pass near Pumice or Mammoth Mtn. into Long Valley on Upper Owens River. These trips were made until summer 1877.

In the fall of 1877 a man fell senseless on one of the streets of San Francisco from a stroke of paralysis. At a hospital he told a father confessor that around 1869 in Salt Lake City he met a man who offered him a salary of

\$1500 a year if he would accompany him in secrecy to California. He did, and they were the men in the above paragraph.

When the Indians dropped them off about a mile west of Mammoth Mtn., they did not cross the summit ridge into Mono County. The first man said he had discovered a valuable gold ledge in 1861 but the Indian war and other circumstances made it impossible for him to return until then. They then both built a secluded cabin by following immediately along the base of the main ridge east of the river, turning north from the trail. Following up the eastern bank of a small stream, they crossed a second one just below where it rushed down the mountainside in a pretty cascade over an odd little grotto in the solid rock, a kind of reddish lava. Beyond this and near the base of a small but beautiful lake of blue water nestling in seclusion between the main ridge and one of its spurs they built a roomy cabin. Grassy meadows provided food for stock.

Then they cautiously crossed the great divide between them and the headwaters of the Owens River, and after a little searching the first man identified certain landmarks which he had retained in memory, and found a reddish ledge, rich in free gold, though not very wide. They took out \$40,000 that summer. They returned to Utah. And with a \$2000 salary the second man returned with the first the next summer. In the fall of '74 the second man was invited by the first to his home - a beautiful farm in the - a western state - 150 miles from Chicago. Here the 1st man was known as a wealthy farmer. The next summer the 1st man brought his family.

On returning in 1877 the 1st man was disturbed by news of the Red Mtn. discoveries. That summer end they decided to leave and cover all traces.

The 1st man was nervous to do this. As they covered the ledge with pumice they heard voices distant. They never returned.

The dying man said they had taken between \$350,000 and \$400,000 from the ledge. The 2nd man was told he would always be provided for.

Was the first man - then respectable - Farnsworth? (a question posed by Wright)

An old pumcheon floor and side pieces had been left at the ledge site in their haste to leave. The cabin had been burned - ashes thrown in Mystic Lake - and the rest covered by pumice.

The cabin location as given by Wright - How?

Precipitous but green and sod-covered mountain side rises abruptly at an angle of over 70 degrees toward the top of Pumice Dome which towers at least 4,000 feet above you. About 80 or 100 feet up is a terrace gradually sloping back some distance and thickly overgrown with cone bearing evergreens and shrubby undergrowth. Through a shallow notch, at least 75 feet above you, and thickly shaded with rich, green bushes, the crystal waters forming this perennial cascade burst upon your sight. There the stream is 4 or 5 feet wide, tho before it reaches the bottom it spreads fanlike to fully 20 feet. In its descent of 75 feet or more the water rushes over smooth lava gray as granite and darker from wetting. A few feet above the seething pool, at the base of the cascade, is the grotto, 5' high, 4' wide, 3' back. "Lily Grotto", called by family. Many plants and much grass.

Another tale states that a surviving German brother passed the original cement map to Gid Whiteman.

Gid Whiteman referred to as Gid F. Whitman by Joseph Wasson in letters to the Bodie Weekly Standard in 1878, was probably the Gideon F. Whiteman, miner listed in Langley's San Francisco Business Directory for 1862.

Whiteman or Whitman, periodically prospected the eastern slope until August of 1880, when paralysis forced him to retire permanently to San Francisco. There he allegedly died in 1883.